**How to Conduct and Record a Great Interview**

**Interview guidelines**

There are two main types of interviews: one is structured where a set of questions are worked out beforehand and asked during the interview. The other is unstructured where there is free discussion on a particular topic. Journalists and oral historians usually favour the structured interview using the questions as a guide. The aim is to get the interviewee to open up and do most of the talking.

It’s a good idea to conduct some practice interviews before you do the real thing!

The following points are useful to think about when organizing and conducting interviews for oral history

#### Before the interview

• Approach the individual and arrange interview.

• Establish the status of the interviewee in the final report. Will they be anonymous, are they happy for you to use their name? Will this be a confidential interview. You need to have the interviewee’s permission (signature) for whatever use you intend for the material generated by the interview.

###### Formulate the interview questions.

Your questions should be:

* Open-ended rather than requiring a ‘yes/no’ response
* Clearly put
* Relevant to the skills and background of the person you are interviewing (think about the age, culture and background of the interviewee)
* Unbiased (not anticipating a particular answer or putting words into the mouth of the interviewee)
* Arranged in a logical order or sequence
* Decide where to interview.
* The location should be free of distractions, somewhere quiet and private

###### Decide what equipment to use.

* Mobile Phone Recorder, Video Camera, Tape or Mini-Disc Recorder, spare batteries, new tape or disc, notebook, pen.

During the interview

* If you intend tape or video the interview, remember to ask permission of the interviewee.
* Put the interviewee at their ease
* Aim for a conversation, rather than interrogation
* Use eye contact
* Be aware of body language
* Listen carefully and try to take your lead from what the person is saying
* Allow the person ample time to respond to the question

***Some things you can say to encourage the flow*:**

“Could you give me an example of…”

“That sounds really interesting, could you tell me more…”

“How did you feel about that….?”  
“So, what were your impressions of…?”

• Be mindful of the time constraints

• Thank the interviewee for their time and comments.

After the interview

•Write up, transcribe or summarise the interview as soon as possible afterwards while it is still fresh in your mind.

• Send the summary or transcripts to the interviewee for approval.

**Analysing the interview (also known as the data)**

* If you have recorded the interview, the more you play the tape, the better feel you will have of the issues and ideas
* Jot down themes as they emerge as you listen to the recording, or highlight on the transcription.
* Keep a record of key quotes that you will use in your report to support your ideas
* The themes will provide you with insights from which to write up your report.

**Processing Your Interview**

Transcribing:

The interviews you have conducted can be processed in different ways depending on the resources you have and the time available.

A transcript is a full written version of the interview. To do this well, you will need to record the interview and play back the tape listening carefully to what has been said. Transcribing is very time consuming and you may want to only transcribe sections so that you have a list of relevant quotes.

For advice on the conventions of transcription see:

Robertson, Beth M. (1996), 3rd Ed. *Oral History Handbook.* Oral history Association of Australia, South Australian Branch Inc.

Summaries:

It may not be feasible to transcribe the whole tape. Consider writing a summary, using selected sections of the tape. A summary should also give an overview of the key topics discussed in the interview.

It’s useful if students work in pairs so that one can conduct the interview leaving the other to take notes. This strategy is helpful if you decide not to transcribe the full tape.

**Interview Log**

**A format for transcribing or recording the details of the interview.**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Topic:** Brunswick:Stories of migration **Interviewer:** John Jones  **Interviewee:** Marie Pasquale  **Date, time and place of interview:**  10/12./02 10am Home of the interviewee 901, Cliff Rd, Brunswick  Tape 10/12/02 Tape 1/1 Side A | | |
| Interview questions & tape counter (or time marker) | Interviewee responses | Factual information |
| 001- 102  Maria, thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for the project.  Can you tell me when you first arrived in Melbourne and where you came from? | I was born in the village of Caprioti in Sicily where my family farmed the land. I arrived in Melbourne in 1951 with my mother and father and four brothers. I was 6 years old when we arrived. I remember this well, during the voyage I had my 6th birthday and we had a party on deck. | Caprioti in Sicily  Arrived in 1951 |
| 102- 131  What was the voyage to Australia like? | We came on a ship called the ‘Fairsky’. It took 6 weeks by sea. I don’t remember much about it except being sick a lot. I do remember the cabin, it was such a squash with seven of us in the one cabin. I was in the bottom bunk with my mother. Dad used to get cross with the boys as they wouldn’t go to sleep at night. | Ship: Fair Sky |
| 131- 142  What are your memories of Melbourne when you arrived? | When we arrived in Melbourne, we lived in a small house in Port Melbourne in Johnson St. with another family. We had fun times then with the other family- we still see the Russos they are part of our family. Anna Russo is godmother to my eldest son Guiseppe and brother Michael married Bianca Russo. Funny how things happen. Your family just grows and grows. Family and friends are the most important things in life…..Without the Russos in those early days, things would have been really tough. For a start, Mum and Dad couldn’t speak English, although we kids picked it up quickly… | Johnson St.  Port Melbourne  Son ,Guiseppe  Brother, Michael  The Russo family, Anna, Bianco |